

Be an Earth-friendly pet owner

1. Beware of Exotic Pets

There are at least 133 species of exotic fish and wildlife in the state of Florida. Many of these non-native animals, including pythons and iguanas, are here because they were released by pet owners when they became too large or expensive keep. Not only is it illegal to release non-native species, it is harmful to the natural environment as exotic species compete with natives for resources and some become top predators.

Think twice before purchasing an exotic pet and do your homework. Exotic pets can be hard work. Make sure that you have the resources to care for that cute little critter when it reaches full size. For example some pythons can grow to be over 10 feet long! If you unable to care for your exotic pet, do not release it into the wild instead try these options:

- Contact a pet store for possible returns
- Give or trade with another hobbyist or pet owner
- Donate to a local school, zoo/ sanctuary, wildlife rehabbers or to animal-related clubs such as 4-H or the St. Lucie Regional Herpetological Society (<http://www.stlucieherps.net/>)
- Check <http://www.myfwc.com/> for pet amnesty days

2. Adopt & License Lassie

Thousands of animals arrive at the St. Lucie County Humane Society every year. You can help by adopting an animal instead of buying from a pet store. Also, protect your pets by ensuring that they are registered and licensed. Both St. Lucie County and the City of Port St. Lucie require that animals are registered so that they can be returned to the owner if they are lost.

Do you still have your heart set on a pure breed? Seek out a rescue organization, many of which are breed-specific. There are several that maintain relationships with animal shelters so they can find permanent homes for popular breeds. Before adopting, be sure to research possible genetic problems that may be common to the breed you are seeking.

3. Be part of the Solution!

Over five thousand unwanted, unhealthy or untreatable animals were euthanized in St. Lucie County from 2006-2007 (<http://www.hsslc.org/statistics.html>). Be a part of the solution by spaying or neutering your pet. This will significantly reduce the cost to register or license your pet with the County. You can also give your pet a longer, healthier life and lessen the chance of harmful medical problems such as certain types of cancer. Call the Humane Society for low-cost or no-cost spaying and neutering options.

4. Organic and/or Holistic Pet Supply Options

Today there are many options for organic and holistic foods for pets. If possible, pass up supermarket foods, which are often made from poor quality meats and have a lot of additives. Instead opt for organic foods made from meat raised or grown in a sustainable way. Or look for holistic foods with ingredients that meet human food quality standards. Be sure to read the product labels for more information.

5. Keep Cats Healthy & Indoors

You can possibly increase your cat's lifespan by years if you keep them indoors. Also, local native wildlife will thank you! House cats are a top predator and kill off thousands of birds and other small animal species each year.

While indoors, consider switching to an environmentally-friendly litter. There are many options available, including those made from biodegradable or recycled products. The alternative choices are often easier to dispose of and contribute to the overall health of your cat and the environment.

Remember keeping yourself informed will keep your furry, feathered or scaly friends happy and healthy!

6. Be Flea Free the Green Way!

Use pine needles, lemon oil, dried sage, fennel, rye or rosemary on or in your pet's bed to help repel fleas and ticks.

7. Be a Pooper Scooper

Responsible pet owners not only make our common areas more pleasant, but also contribute to the health of our waterways. Be sure to pick up after Fido and eliminate the waste from reaching our rivers.